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ABSTRACT

This report examines how the traditional roles and relationships between a school system as owner, and the architect, as designer, are substantially altered when educational facilities share their spaces for non-school use. It indicates that shared use often brings school systems into conflict with their new partners over design criteria, building access and control, and scheduling. These additional funding sources and user groups may have their own defined cultures, which through a period of trial and error, must adjust to the two established cultures of the architect and the school system, and vice versa. Both the school system and the architect, their historical roles substantially changed with the introduction of new stakeholders, now must adjust to the additional owners and using groups whose criteria sometimes are at odds with the established school system. The extent of these conflicting cultures is described. (Contains 13 references.) (GR)

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Cultural Impact of Participants in the Design of Community Schools

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Abstract

The trend of designing and constructing community schools has many advantages for lifelong learning in the community. With shared use comes shared responsibility for design, funding, ownership and operation. Traditional roles and relationships between the school system, as owner, and the architect, as designer, are substantially altered. Additional stakeholders are introduced, including funders (owners) and user groups (design influence). The school systems have always had complete control over design and construction criteria, scheduling, access and security, and operations for the sole benefit of the school system. A very strong culture has developed which does not readily entertain changes in policy. The architect, likewise, operates within a well-defined culture based upon working with the school system. These two cultures are distinct and mutually beneficial. The introduction of additional stakeholders "undefines" the traditional roles of the school system and the architect. The school system will many times find it in conflict with its new partners over design criteria, building access and control, and scheduling. The additional funding sources and user groups may have their own defined cultures, which through a period of trial and error, must adjust to the two established cultures. The two established cultures, likewise, must adjust to the introduction of additional cultures. The roles of the school system and the architect are substantially changed. The school system, as owner, must allow the design and operations input of additional owners. The architect must adjust to the additional owners, and to using groups whose design criteria are sometimes at odds with the established school system.

Cultural Impact of Participants in the Design of Community Schools

The trend toward designing and constructing community schools has many advantages for lifelong learning in the community. Students and community members benefit from an integrated set of activities which support the school system's curriculum, while providing real life interaction in the real world. Community members have access to resources and facilities that support a continuous, lifelong learning experience through social, physical and cultural activities that enhance daily living.

Community schools share the following characteristics: they are planned and operated through a participatory planning process that involves a true cross section of the community; they are jointly operated by several agencies; the operating budgets are separate from the budgets of the agencies involved and are reviewed periodically by all parties; use is governed by a council of participating agencies and community representatives; and administration is typically by unit managers with advice from the participating agencies (Ringer & Decker, 1995, p. 17).

Community use of schools is not a new idea; it dates back to the "little red schoolhouse" which functioned as the center of all community activities (Decker, 1992, p. 5). Over the years a number of factors have worked together, not the least of which is the school culture itself, to isolate public schools from their communities. During the baby boom years, the 1950's and 1960's, many new schools were built away from population centers to take advantage of larger and less costly sites. The advent of the interstate highway system also dispersed the population centers away from the economic and commerce centers. A by-product of this era was the shift of the responsibility for community educational needs from the local community to state and federal governments, and a decreased level of local effort to resolve community-based problems (Decker, 1992, p. 8).

A report of the National Association of Secondary School Principals suggests a number of reforms to the high school institution that will reverse this trend, and in fact, support the idea of community schools. Recommendations include going beyond traditional funding sources to seek political and financial relationships in the community, to supplement funds and resources in support of educational programs (Breaking Ranks, 1996, p.89). It also suggests that the academic program be extended to the community to take advantage of learning opportunities in the community (Breaking Ranks, 1996, p. 50). Conversely, one can infer that, by opening the high school to the community, opportunities outside the school campus are brought to the school.

Community use opens the opportunities for additional funding mechanisms. In return, tax payers, and particularly taxpayers without children in the school system, begin to realize a much greater return on taxpayers' dollars (Fickes, 1998, p.62). With shared use comes shared responsibility for the design, funding, ownership and operations. Traditional roles of the architect, as designer, and the school system as owner, are substantially altered. Additional stakeholders are introduced, including funders (other owners), and user groups (design influence). The school system has traditionally been very turf conscious. As an organization, it generally has a very strong culture and subcultures that do not readily entertain changes in policy. The architect, on the other hand, represents a second culture. The architect works with input from experience and the school system as to budget, scope, program and construction requirements from the school system, delivering a project to meet these well-defined criteria as output. Though two distinct cultures, a very strong and mutually beneficial relationship exists.

The introduction of additional stakeholders "undefines" the traditional roles of the architect and the school system. Two cultures that have adjusted to work well together must now work with a third culture, which in fact may not be an identifiable culture. This requires cultural

changes that affect the roles of each. The school system will many times find it in conflict with its new partners over issues of design criteria, building access and control, and uses. The new stakeholders, as a group, bring varying degrees of organization and experience in design and construction and operation. Collectively, they may represent a single, well-defined structure, or may just be a collection of smaller cultures and individuals. Both internal and external conflict between stakeholders may be present.

The role of the school system will be altered to include the additional stakeholders as partners. The culture of the school system will be faced with internal conflicts, as longstanding policies and prejudices must be changed to address design, access and control issues. Subcultures based on hierarchy and fiefdoms will be challenged.

The role of the architect will be changed to reflect the additional stakeholders, and to possibly provide leadership to the process. The architect will be faced with multiple owners, using groups and funding sources. The decision making process may be cumbersome and time consuming. The sequence and timing of traditional design services may be altered to accommodate funding approvals and availability, or to allow extra fundraising activities.

An organization's culture is defined as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1992, p. 12). Culture is the things seen and unseen, conscious and unconscious, that direct an organization to behave in somewhat predictable ways in reaction to events. Every culture may be made up of many subcultures, with shared assumptions about values and missions, while differing in relation to hierarchy, occupation, location, function and others (Schein, 1992, p. 256). The design of

community schools therefore must accommodate the cultures of all participants.

In order to affect certain changes to the culture of public school systems to enable the successful design of a community school, one must understand the culture and where some of the major impediments to cooperation come from. The culture of the public school system has been the subject of much study. In addition to the external factors previously mention contributing to isolation of the school system, there has been a conscious, internal effort to separate education from the auspices of government in general. This has resulted in the assumption that schools are only to be used for activities closely associated with strictly defined educational processes. Contributing ways in which schools have become separated include providing their own transportation, libraries, and health and social services (Ringer & Decker, 1995, p. 4). This isolation also stems from school organization in the mid nineteenth century, where the atmosphere was one of individualism; teachers rarely shared ideas and resources (Hargreaves, 1995, p. 3 of 7).

Another aspect resides in the doctrine of teacher education, and it is usually educators that rise to the decision making positions in school planning. Developmentalism is a doctrine promoting natural development of the education process. This process also affects parenting and socialization. Developmentalism predisposes the teaching profession to favor certain practices based upon intuition and to ignore other practices, regardless of empirically demonstrated merit (Stone, 1996, 11 of 29). This becomes evident when trying to incorporate changes to the school culture as in the design of community schools.

Public school systems are relatively closed structures, and there are rules and policies for providing instruction, delivering services, and administering the system (Felter, 1994, p. 4 of 17). Whereas the innovations are initiated, they usually come from external sources. Innovations are

eventually dropped for later, newer policies (Fullan, 1998, p. 1 of 6). Thus the system culture sets the tone for dealing with facilities: change is difficult to bring about.

The people responsible for design decision making are, for the most part, transposed educators. They are under pressure to conform to budgets, schedules and design criteria, and generally for a subculture based upon the specific task of addressing the facility needs of the school system. The facilities subculture generally relates to the system as a service provider/internal client relationship, but maintains the much of the underlying assumptions of the system culture. This subculture reacts to budget constraints and schedules by making the design process as routine as possible, trying to minimize customization and circumventing proposals that have not been tried before, as is developmentalism prevalent among the active teachers. This results in a desire for simplicity in design and material selection to ease maintenance of all school facilities. A community school is a complex design and may require materials that are otherwise unacceptable to the school system.

Schedules are a fact of life. School projects need to be initiated years in advance of their actual need. Funding approval and bond issues may take valuable time away from an otherwise workable schedule, putting pressure on the school system and the architect to shorten a lengthy design process. Funding approval may be limited to certain fiscal years, or may require submissions for approval to comply with legislative sessions.

Likewise, a need for security permeates the design process, from location and access to specific spaces to intrusion alarm systems. A community school invites members of the community to enter unattended throughout the school day.

The relationship to the architect is an ally/adversarial one. Initially, the design professional is an ally, working closely with the school system to develop the design. Once the

project enters the construction phase, the design professional becomes an impartial third party who may have to mediate between the school system and the contractor actually building the school.

Other external controls include federal, state and local regulations that must be adhered to by the school system, and may include space standards; services to be provided but not funded; local building, life safety, and zoning codes and regulations.

Design aesthetics may take lower priority to other issues due to budget constraints. Construction budgets are getting tighter as a result of tax caps and a shrinking tax base. Even design aesthetics that are not compromised by budget concerns may require conservatism to preclude even the appearance of extravagant spending of tax dollars.

The school system's role as owner, is well defined and is based upon control of budgets, schedule, and design and construction criteria.

The culture of the design professional is likewise well defined and is based on a professional service provider/client relationship with the school system. The leading proponent of the profession is the American Institute of Architects, which has been instrumental in educating architects and clients, establishing accepted procedures for design, accepted forms of agreement for services, and even the content of professional services. Most architects and school systems subscribe to these procedures and forms and consider them to be mutually beneficial. Specialization among architectural firms may be by educational facilities, or may extend to K-12 versus higher education, or public schools as opposed to private schools.

As a profession, architects need to be pragmatic and business like in dealing with public school systems. They are design oriented, with aesthetics playing a major role in the entire process. They harbor a desire for more aesthetics with correlating increases in budget. Budget

concerns, however, may require bringing bad news to the client. Their ally/adversarial role changes at the time of bidding, to become the impartial third party to rule on contract disputes between the school system and the contractor.

External controls on the architect include the school systems budget and schedule; design criteria and space standards; and building, life safety and zoning codes and regulations. The school system's design and construction criteria are aimed at eliminating expensive maintenance problems or controlling initial costs.

Procedures that are externally imposed are local and state procedures for funding and design approval, requiring certain information and documents to be prepared to justify or explain the project.

The role of the architect is as a provider of services and a product to the school system. Minor differences in levels of service, expertise and talent exist from firm to firm. All firms providing services to school systems however, are familiar with the requirements of the school systems and their externally imposed controls and requirements. An experienced architect can provide the level of design aesthetics that meets the needs and desires of the school system.

When, in the case of community schools, additional stakeholders are introduced and the well defined cultures of the school system and the architect must adapt their roles to accommodate the new stakeholders. The additional participants may represent a culture in itself, or may be a group of individuals acting in a concerted effort to accomplish a task. Where a group exists, a culture will eventually arise as a result of collectively working to resolve problems associated with their concept of a community school.

The architectural culture adapts fairly easily to the additional stakeholders, since in the course of usual business architects need to work with and within a variety of cultures. If the

architect is aware that relationships change with the introduction of additional stakeholders, then the adjustment required of the architect will be straight forward. The architect also has the opportunity to become the change leader in the process. If the architect is not aware of the changes in relationships, he may become frustrated at not arriving at clear decisions or solutions in a timely manner, and will be subject to conflicting desires and requests. However, being aware of the changes, he can work towards resolving the conflicts and indecision that will invariably be present.

Community involvement in the planning process is known as participatory decision making, and often yields outcomes that are more satisfactory to the community than when the community is not involved (Ringer & Decker, 1995, p. 27). The decision making criteria also changes because the cost benefit analysis may be concerned less with economic efficiency, which could be at odds with the routine way of thinking at the school system. The inclusion of lay people from the community also presents the need to educate them on the design process, and to retrace many decisions that are understood by the school system and the architect as being routine. Community involvement in the design process requires careful management and cooperation from all sides (Fickes, 1998, p. 62).

Obstacles to be overcome in the participation of the community and the design of community schools are many and include the different cultures, differences in understanding between the cultures, inadequate role clarification, turf conflicts, time, race and class concerns, lack of trust, and legal and administrative issues (Ringer & Decker, 1995, p. 43). One or all of the participating cultures may need to be structurally changed in order to successfully complete a community school. The school system that traditionally operates on set procedures may have to change or adapt to new procedures, or existing fiefdoms may need to be violated. Inadequate

role clarification can result in selection of incorrect criteria, or the imposition of incorrect requirements from one agency upon the other. Turf battles may result as the school system fights to maintain control over what it traditionally has controlled, while other agencies fight to gain control over new found territory. Change takes time, in particular the design of community schools. The schedule may not accommodate the necessary time. Race and class issues are almost always present, but may be just below the surface and underlie all other issues. The lack of trust between the community and the school system is based upon the long standing aloofness of the school system and may prevent agreements from being reached. Finally, differing administrative and legal issues could preclude reaching agreements when the requirements of each entity are mutually exclusive.

In order to affect changes to the cultures of the school system and/or the community, the architect may have to act as the change agent, if none are existing in either of the other cultures. When a change agent is absent, it is to the architect's benefit to fill the need, as he has much to lose in lost fees and overruns resulting from indecisions and faulty decisions. The change of culture requires the involvement of critics and detractors (Hargreaves, 1995, p. 4 of 7). These individuals will bring a different perspective to the project. If nothing else, by being a part of the decision team, their potential for public criticism of the project in the future will be neutralized.

A culture can be changed by a process described as unfreezing-cognitive change-refreezing (Schein, 1992, p. 299). Essentially, the existing culture can be permanently changed if enough motivation for change is present in the form of financial opportunity or pressure from higher up the system ladder, such as from the superintendent. The three factors that must be present are disconforming data; anxiety caused by the disconforming data, and a sense that a workable solution is available for discovery.

The first example to examine is Wilde Lake High School. Wilde Lake High School was slated by the Howard County, Maryland, Public School System for complete renovation and an addition; the actual design was to commence in 1994. Concurrent to the initial planning efforts by Howard County Public Schools, the Howard County Arts Council had been conducting a series of studies and surveys to determine the artistic needs of the community. They determined that a performance space for community and professional music and dance groups, of the size of approximately 800 seats, was required (Arts Vision 2001, 1992, p. 4). This size fit comfortably between the local community college at 300 seats, and the professional concert pavilion at 8,000 seats. The arts council approached the school system about sharing the funding and the use of the proposed new Wilde Lake High School auditorium. The ultimate success of the Wilde Lake project resulted from the successful partnership between the school system and the arts council, and the willingness of everyone involved to look beyond their primary responsibilities and roles (Fickes, 1998, p. 66).

The Howard County Arts Council represented a distinct culture, as the organization representing all the community arts groups in Howard County, Maryland. The organization had been ongoing, with a budget and regularly scheduled events. The organization derived its vision and espoused values form the executive director.

The Howard County Public School System represented a culture very much like the culture described above as typical of public school systems. One difference was that the superintendent of schools was very much in favor of exploring the partnership with the arts council, when the idea was initially put forward. His value placed on the importance of the arts program of Howard County Public Schools was expressed in the culture of the school system as a whole. Upon completion and community acceptance of the new facility, the chairwoman of the

Board of Education when the process first started, acknowledged:

> "The hardest thing was to do something new, to have the faith that something new could be done, that we could break the mold" (Selby, 1997, 1E).

The role of the school system was that of leader, taking the initiative to incorporate the design requirements of the arts council into the design. The role of the architect changed in that it became a more complex design project.

The second example is that of the addition of a new performing arts center to be constructed onto the existing Bowie High School, in Bowie, Maryland. This example differs from Wilde Lake High School in that at Bowie, the project is to be fully funded by the community, with the Prince George's Public School System providing the land and staffing. The community effort is being headed by the Bowie Regional Arts Vision Association (BRAVA), a 501c corporation founded solely for the purpose of planning and constructing the new facility. The new 800 seat facility is to replace a design of a 1400 seat facility designed in 1975 but never constructed due to lack of funding (Vision 2000, 1997). Unlike at Wilde Lake, this project was not fully embraced by the school system and required political maneuvering to acquire eventual approval. Getting the school board's approval was an obstacle that was overcome. However, the decision to allow the project to go forward was far from unanimous. The greatest issue was the allocation of outside money towards this specific project (Emanuel, 1996, A2) Also in this case, another stakeholder is the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), a multi-county agency, which has participated in other school projects to provide extended athletic facilities or improvements.

The Prince George's County Public School System culture is more that of the typical public school system described previously. During the pre-interview and interview process, it

became quite evident that they were very concerned with school security. The school system was to be the owner of the facility after construction, but until then BRAVA would be owner and hold the contracts, as well as make all payments. At one of the first meetings in the pre-design period, the question of ownership surfaced, when it became apparent that upholstered seating and carpeting were required of a "civic" auditorium. The school system representative immediately became concerned and suggested that the issue of ownership had to be re-examined, since the school system 1) had no other facility with upholstered seating, and 2) had a policy against installing carpeting in schools. The county did not have the expertise or equipment to care for either, and the theoretical rotation of maintenance staff would preclude getting and keeping the expertise. The issue was resolved several meetings later when a board member said the county would do what it takes to care for both the upholstered seating and the carpeting.

An agreement between the owner and the architect took 5 months to resolve, and fee was not the issue. BRAVA was the theoretical owner; the school system would administer the contract on behalf of BRAVA. The school system was very familiar with architectural agreements, and modeled the agreement after the "standard" contract. BRAVA, on the other hand no experience with contracts or procedures, with the exception of the leader, an architect, and a board member, who administered construction contracts with the Corps of Engineers. As a result, every detail of the proposed agreement was discussed in detail and debated at several BRAVA board meetings.

BRAVA meetings were held every second Tuesday of the month. Members resisted scheduling separate meetings to address issues that were time critical, electing to delay the progress of aspects of the project until discussion could occur at the regularly scheduled meetings. The meetings are led by the president, yet observed decisions were only voted upon

when it appeared that full consensus was present. The project has had a very difficult time getting started, due in part to the many issues that were not resolved clearly when the partnership entered into the process. Basic issues such as ownership, the form of agreement, the type of construction management delivery system, and the very basic "what type of facility is this going to be" were reviewed at length will little consensus in the beginning. BRAVA conducted some basic information collected from written questionnaires, but was somewhat reluctant to share this information with the design consultants. Whenever the design consultants suggested conducting our own user group in-depth interviews, BRAVA resisted, saying they had already done that work. After a several month delay, we were finally able to conduct four separate interviews.

The role of the owner changed in both projects. In the case of Wilde Lake High School, the role changes were mostly transparent to myself as the architect. I am sure this was aided by the enthusiasm towards the project of the board of education and the superintendent. The primary visible change was that the owner adopted the concept, and only occasionally reviewed the project with the arts council as it progressed. Early decisions were made in a timely manner, and were rarely retracted as a result of further discussions. I noticed a reluctance, however, of the school system personnel to communicate with the arts council, preferring to "go it alone" instead of including them in the day to day decision making process. The project was successful, but the school system staff was obviously unhappy with the additional stakeholder. On numerous occasions they commented that the project would be so much easier if they could have just designed and built the school.

Bowie, on the other hand, is only just beginning the design phase and already has a significant history of conflict. The role of the school system as owner of record and administrator of the design contract, is substantially changed. The different parts of the school

system that routinely enforce design and construction policy are reminded occasionally by the contract administrator that this theater is essentially a gift to the school system, and the school system is not the owner until construction is complete. BRAVA, on the other hand, in not an "educated" owner, having never been through a construction project as a group before. Much meeting time is spent educating the members of BRAVA on the accepted terms and conditions of the design agreement, and the design process itself. There is mistrust between the community that BRAVA represents, and the school system. This was evident at the focus group meeting held with the community using groups. Several people raised the issue of distrust directly, commenting on what safeguards there will be to preclude the school from shutting out the community groups in the future. At the first focus group meeting with the school faculty and administration, it was very apparent that the school principal and faculty were not familiar with the project as it had evolved. They were under the impression that the facility would be twice the size and serve as overflow classroom space, a venue for pep rallies, band rehearsal hall and detention hall. It was clear that while the school system representative and the BRAVA board had been talking to each other, neither was talking to the constituency they represented. Both parties had proceeded to the present under the assumption that the MNCPPC was a full partner the funding and operation of the facility. The MNCPPC representative was quite clear at the first several meetings, stating that the MNCPPC had not been requested to be a assist in the operation and operating costs, and that the commission in fact had no budget to do so.

In both projects, we had to find a common language, choose words and define their meaning, before a common understanding could be reached on many issues. The language problem existed (exists) for every subgroup or subculture that met. Scheduling continues to difficult at the Bowie project. The BRAVA members resist meeting in the daytime because they

all work at other jobs. The school faculty resists meeting in the evenings, because it is beyond their call of duty; their position is supported by the teachers union.

In the design of community schools, in which funding is provided in part or in whole from sources outside the normal sources, the roles of the architect and the owner are substantially changed to reflect the additional "owner(s)." The culture of the school system is generally very difficult to accept the new owner, and conflict may result. The new owner, being aware of aloofness and independent atmosphere of the school system, may harbor distrust towards the school system. The architect must be able to recognize these issues and be able to negotiate through a variety of crises and conflicts. The clearly defined roles of each become "undefined," to be redefined through a period of negotiation and conflict. When each party is aware of the sources of conflict and resistance, redefinition of the roles can start to take place. The architect, in the absence of a strong leader from either set of owners or other participants, will have to provide the leadership necessary to successfully complete the project.

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